OUTSMARTING YOUR MIND TRAPS

EMILY GOLINSKY
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BRIGHT MOOSE
TRAINING, CONSULTING & ADVOCACY

TODAY'S TOPICS OF INTEREST:

- WHAT ARE MIND TRAPS, ANYWAYS?
- HOW BIAS AFFECTS COLLABORATION
- 10 WAYS THE BRAIN "TRICKS" US INTO NEGATIVE THINKING
- STRATEGIES TO COMBAT MIND TRAPS

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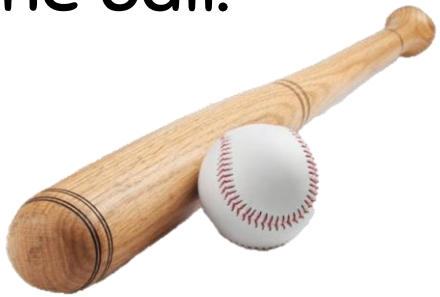
BUT FIRST, A QUICK TEST...

A bat and ball together cost $1.10.

The bat costs $1.00 more than the ball.

How much is the ball?



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BUT FIRST, A QUICK TEST...

Ball $0.05
+ Bat $1.05
$1.10

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WHAT ARE MIND TRAPS, ANYWAYS?

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COOL FACTS!

- Also called "Cognitive Distortions"
- Discovered by psychologist Aaron Beck in 1976
- 1980's: David Burns gave them catchy names

Not as cool:
They can really drag you down

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THINKING TRAPS ARE...

...irrational thought patterns that blind us to the truth, causing us to make errors in judgment.

...actually, a combined exaggeration of a threat and an underestimation of our ability to deal with it.

...a fun little game our brains play that limits possibilities and undermines our resources to cope with inevitable challenges.

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https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-right-mindset/201912/ten-mind-traps-dampen-your-happiness-and-create-misery

THE DANGEROUS, CIRCULAR LOGIC OF A THINKING TRAP

It sounds rational in the moment, but actually triggers negative feelings and pessimism

Our mind convinces us of one thing when in reality it's completely untrue.

Inaccurate thoughts are used to reinforce negative thinking patterns

We miss critical information about the situation or other individuals

Mindsethealth.com/matter/thinking

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THEY'RE PROBLEMATIC BECAUSE...

...they can cause short-term emotional distress that mirrors common mental health challenges

...they can affect judgement and good decision-making by sucking up valuable brain processing energy

BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE!

Learning to identify and overcome these biases can significantly improve the way staff perceive their abilities and find satisfaction in their job, encouraging them to use coping skills instead of just...quitting.

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TODAY'S TOPICS OF INTEREST:

HOW BIAS AFFECTS COLLABORATION

10 WAYS THE BRAIN "TRICKS" US INTO NEGATIVE THINKING

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT MIND TRAPS

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How Biases Can Affect Collaboration

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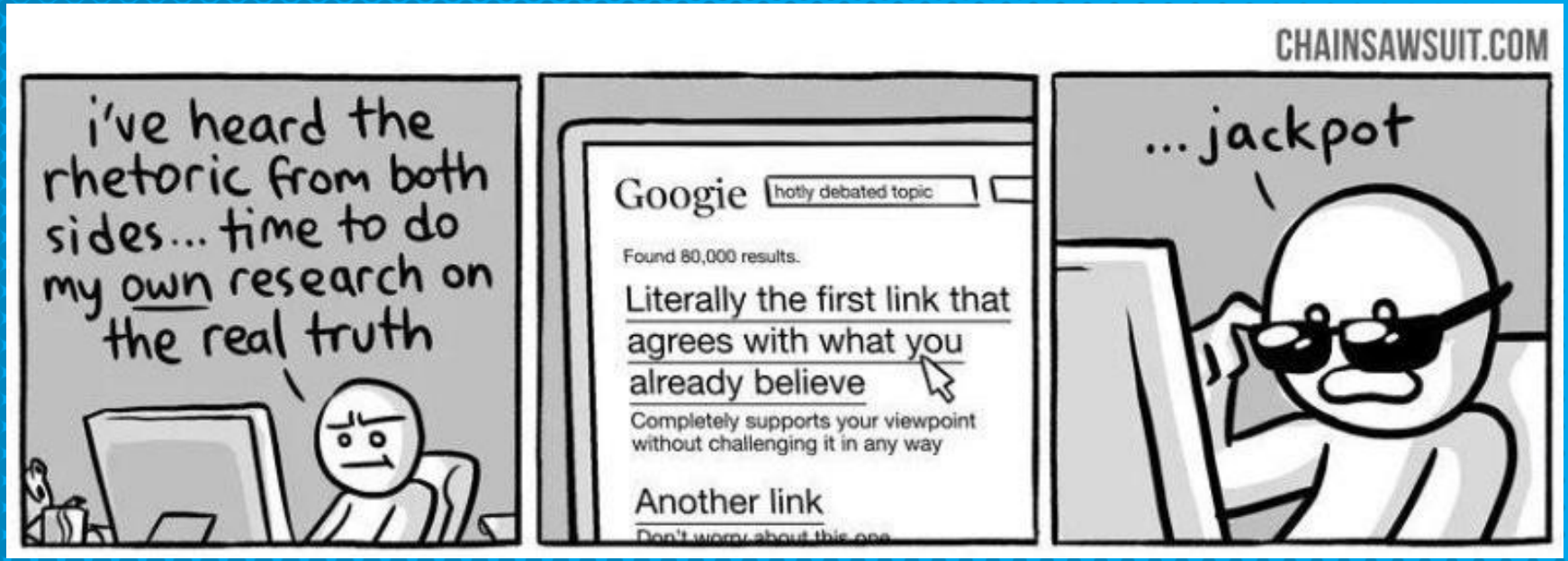
BIAS EXISTS IN LOTS OF FORMS...



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IT AFFECTS OUR ABILITY TO COLLABORATE...

...biases affect the way we process information, so they can impede objective reception of others' messages

...mind traps introduce influences into the decision making process that are separate from the decision itself

...our own perspectives layer themselves over what others say/do, affecting confidence levels in their work

Factors at play in Mind Traps:

- Social and cultural pressure
- Professional background
- Education
- Emotions
- Motivations of perceived success/failure

https://innodirect.com/top-ten-biase

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TODAY'S TOPICS OF INTEREST:

10 WAYS THE BRAIN "TRICKS" US INTO NEGATIVE THINKING

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT MIND TRAPS

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10 WAYS THE BRAIN "TRICKS" US INTO NEGATIVE THINKING

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#1 ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

We only look at situations in terms of one extreme or the other. A situation is either good or bad, perfect or terrible – there is no middle ground.

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ALL OR NOTHING THINKING #1

We only look at situations in terms of one extreme or the other

"This field trip is awful. The kids can't handle it, I'm exhausted, this place is probably crawling in COVID, and if we're here one more second I'm going to lose a member somehow. What a nightmare."

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#2 OVER-GENERALIZING

We think of a single negative event as part of a series of unending negative events. We assume it predicts a pattern.

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OVER-GENERALIZING

#2

We assume a single negative event predicts a pattern.

"Today was rough. The entire year is going to suck. #WrongJob."

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MENTAL FILTERING

#3

We dwell only on the negative aspects of a situation, ignoring the positive or moderate aspects.

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MENTAL FILTERING

#3

We dwell on the negatives and
ignore the positive/moderate aspects.

"Yeah, I won Staff of the Week last month,
but that was a fluke. I'm a terrible employee."

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FALLACY OF FAIRNESS

#4

We feel resentful because we think that we know what is fair, and others are not abiding by it.

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FALLACY OF FAIRNESS

#4

We think we know what is fair
and others are not abiding by it

"Sarah got that promotion to Shift Lead that I deserved. So not fair."

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MIND READING

(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

#5

We believe we know what others are thinking, and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us.

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MIND READING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

#5

We assume that others are thinking the worst of us

"The director thinks I'm doing a bad job. I can just tell by the way they look at me."

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#6 FORTUNE TELLING

(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART 2)

We anticipate that things will turn out badly – that the future is set in stone and destined to be negative.

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FORTUNE TELLING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART 2)

#6

We anticipate that the future is negative and set in stone

"Ugh, look at the activities I'm supposed to lead today. The kids will hate these and my day will be ruined."

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#7 CATASTROPHIZING

We imagine that the worst-case scenario will definitely happen, and predict that we won't be able to cope well when it does.

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CATASTROPHIZING

#7

We imagine the worst case scenario
and predict that we can't cope with it

"That kid has a cough and now we're all going to die of COVID."

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EMOTIONAL REASONING

#8

We take our emotions as evidence for the truth. Whatever we are feeling at the time is believed to be true automatically and unconditionally, regardless of evidence.

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EMOTIONAL REASONING

#8

We believe that what we are feeling must be the truth

"I'm feeling bummed out today. I must be clinically depressed."
#NotHowItWorks

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#9

SHOULD STATEMENTS

We have ironclad rules for how we, or others, should and should not behave. We may also set unreachably high standards for ourselves and for others.

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SHOULD STATEMENTS

#9

We set rigid expectations for how we and others should behave

"I should have been able to handle that without a director having to come help me."

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#10 PERSONALIZATION

VERSION 1

We see ourselves as responsible for events around us, for which we actually had little/no responsibility.

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PERSONALIZATION

#10

We assume responsibility for events for which, in reality, we had no responsibility

VERSION I

"I filled out the incident report honestly and now it's my fault that one of the kids was asked to leave the program for a week."

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PERSONALIZATION #10

VERSION 2

We believe everything others say or do is some kind of direct, personal reaction to something we have said or done.

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PERSONALIZATION

#10

We believe everything others say or do is a direct, personal reaction

VERSION 2

"My co-worker is so grumpy today. I wonder what I did to upset them?"

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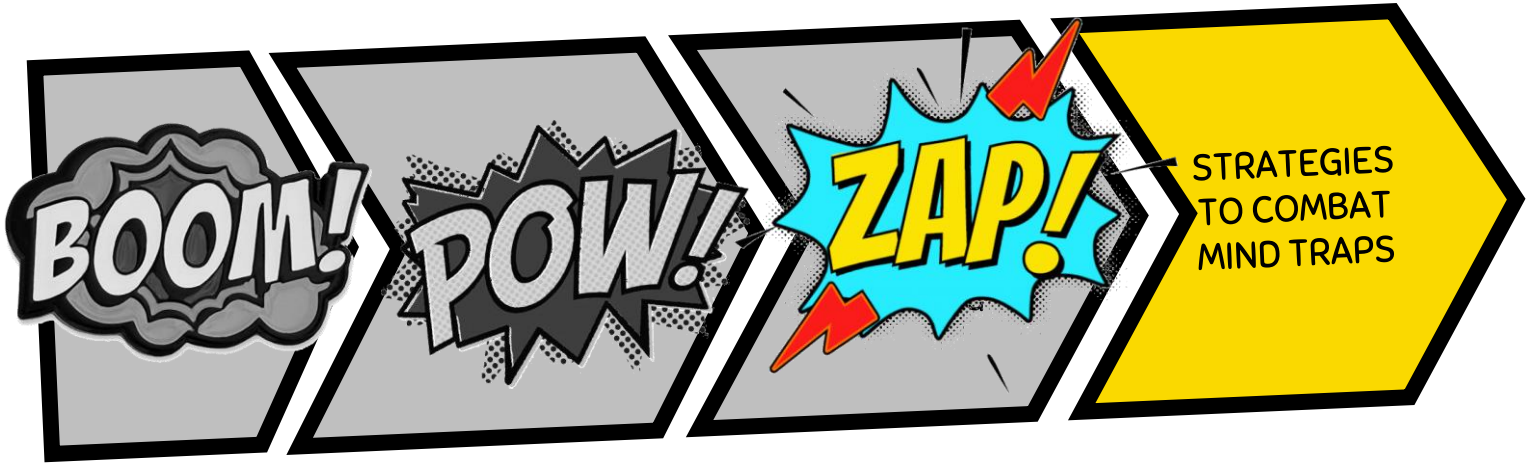

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Strategies to Combat These Mind Traps

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#1

UNDERSTAND THAT A MIND TRAP IS AN OVERLY RIGID THOUGHT PATTERN

#2

NOTICE, IDENTIFY AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE SPECIFIC TRAP THAT IS BEING USED

"The resilience inventory: Seven essential skills for overcoming life's obstacles and determining happiness" by

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#3

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION TO HELP CHALLENGE THE THOUGHT PATTERN

#4

REFUTE AND DISPUTE THE THOUGHT EACH AND EVERY TIME IT APPEARS

"The resilience inventory: Seven essential skills for overcoming life's obstacles and determining happiness" by

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#1

UNDERSTAND THAT A MIND TRAP IS AN OVERLY RIGID THOUGHT PATTERN

It's not the situation that causes feelings of negativity – it is our response

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#2

NOTICE, IDENTIFY AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE SPECIFIC TRAP THAT IS BEING USED

- "Wait a sec, this is a mind trap!"
- "What pattern is my brain using right now?"
- "Hey, slow down, this is catastrophizing."

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#3

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION TO HELP CHALLENGE THE THOUGHT PATTERN

- Critically examine the way the brain is presenting this information.
- **Thoughts are not facts.** Don't assume that because you thought it, it is true.

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VERSIONS OF CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO CHALLENGE A MIND TRAP

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE:
Try to find evidence against the thought.

DOUBLE STANDARD:
Ask yourself if you are applying the same standard to yourself and others.

CONDUCT AN EXPERIMENT:
Test your beliefs in person.
Try out your hypothesis.

SURVEY METHOD:
Find out whether other people you trust agree with your thoughts.

© 1989 by David D. Burns, M.D. fr

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VERSIONS OF CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO CHALLENGE A MIND TRAP

THINK IN SHADES OF GRAY: Evaluate things on a range of 0 – 100

SEMANTIC METHOD: Substitute less colorful/emotionally loaded language

DEFINE THE TERMS: What is the definition of that label?

COST- BENEFIT ANALYSIS: List all the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling/negative thought

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ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

#1

We only look at situations in terms of one extreme or the other. There's no middle ground.

"Did this thought include any of these words: always, never, everybody, or nobody?"

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

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#4

Refute and dispute the thought each and every time it appears

- Firmly counter the thought with a clear statement of positivity or neutrality
- As you dispute the negative thinking over and over, it will diminish over time. Your brain will automatically replace it with more rational, balanced thinking.

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ALL OR NOTHING THINKING

#1

We only look at situations in terms of one extreme or the other. There's no middle ground.

"There is usually a third option at a fork in the road."

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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#1

UNDERSTAND THE PATTERN

#2

NOTICE, IDENTIFY & ACKNOWLEDGE

#3

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

#4

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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OVER-GENERALIZING

#2

We think of a single negative event as part of a series of unending negative events. We predict a pattern.

"Where is the proof for this? Is this actually an exaggeration?"

"One positive thing that has happened is..."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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MENTAL FILTERING

#3

We dwell only on the negative aspects of a situation, ignoring the positive or moderate aspects.

"Did I qualify my positive statement with a 'but'?"

"I can replace the 'but' with 'and', then add something positive."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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FALLACY OF FAIRNESS

#4

We feel resentful because we think that we know what is fair, and others are not abiding by it.

"Is my definition of fairness in this situation something everyone involved would agree on?"

"Fair does not mean I always come out on top."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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MIND READING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

#5

We believe we know what others are thinking, and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us.

"What actual facts do I have that I can use to evaluate this assumption?"

"Assumptions are not the truth. When you assume..."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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MIND READING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

#5

We believe we know what others are thinking, and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us.

ASSUME = MAKE AN ASS OF U AND ME

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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MIND READING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

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"What actual facts do I have that I can use to evaluate this assumption?"

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ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

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MIND READING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART I)

#5

We believe we know what others are thinking, and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us.

"Am I making an assumption based on a previous interaction with this person?"

"Just because I got reprimanded once, that doesn't mean that's all my supervisor notices about me."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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FORTUNE TELLING
(JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS PART 2)

#6

We anticipate that things will turn out badly – that the future is set in stone and destined to be negative.

"Where is the evidence for this conclusion?"

"If I don't make a change, I can't expect a different outcome. I am going to change..."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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CATASTROPHIZING

#7

We anticipate that things will turn out badly – that the future is set in stone and destined to be negative.

"What is the worst thing will happen?"

"That isn't as bad as I first thought."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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CATASTROPHIZING

#7

We anticipate that things will turn out badly – that the future is set in stone and destined to be negative.

"How likely is it that the worst thing will happen?"

"10% likely? Then there's 90% that it won't happen. Even if it's 50/50, let's plan for both."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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EMOTIONAL REASONING

#8

We take our emotions for the truth. Whatever we are feeling at the time is believed to be true, regardless of evidence.

"How can I separate out my feelings and then fact-check my initial conclusion?"

"Emotions are feelings, not facts. It's OK to be [angry] but, do I make my best decisions when I am [angry]? Or should I wait until I'm calmer?

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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SHOULD STATEMENTS

#9

We have ironclad rules for how we, or others, should and should not behave. We may also set unreachably high standards.

"Would I judge other people if they did this same thing? Am I being harder on myself than I am on other people?"

"Standards and values are subjective. I need to give myself the same grace I show others."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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PERSONALIZATION
VERSION I

#10

We see ourselves as responsible for events around us, for which we actually had little/no responsibility.

"What is inside my circle of control, and what is outside it?"

"I had no part in making that decision. I did my job as required."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

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PERSONALIZATION
VERSION 2

#10

We believe everything others say or do is some kind of direct, personal reaction to something we have said or done.

"What is the likelihood that I am the center of the universe today?"

"I can't know what they are thinking unless I ask them."

ASK A CRITICAL QUESTION

REFUTE & DISPUTE

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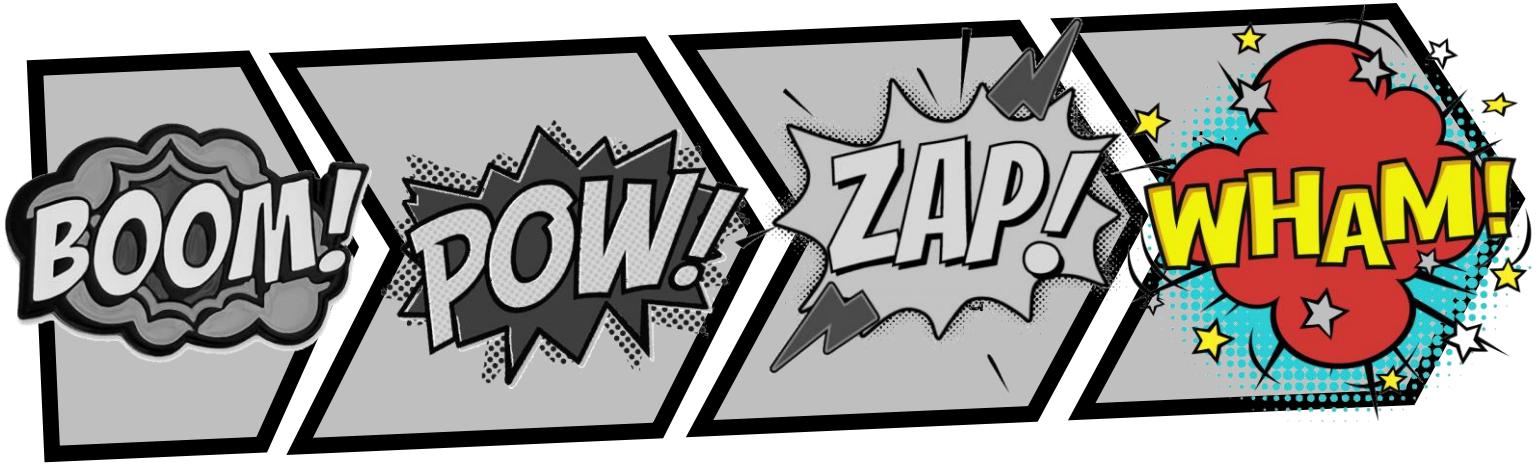

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A FEW LINGERING NOTES:

- Humans are more logical thinkers when we're in a "good space."
- Mind traps are more likely to happen as we decompensate
  - When basic needs aren't being met (tired, hungry, etc.)
  - Beware especially aware of when the "honeymoon" wears off after you've been at work for a few days after a break

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A FEW LINGERING NOTES:

- Self-care & taking care of needs is a key defense
- If feel yourself getting stuck, ask: "what am I not doing to take care of myself that I'm falling into this pattern?"
- Then, identify and commit to at least one change that addresses the lack of care.

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...AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

- It takes ***YEARS*** to master these skills...
- ...and even then, humans aren't great at it :)

- Addressing Mind Traps isn't about conquering them immediately, but about awareness and intentional thought shifts.

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